

IN BRIEF

A RECENT RECORD OF THE MADAGASCAR POCHARD *AYTHYA*
INNOTATA ON LAKE ALAOTRA, MADAGASCAR

Langrand (1990) considered the endemic Madagascar Pochard *Aythya innotata* one of Madagascar's "rarest and most threatened bird species", and it has been classified in the Red Data Book as endangered (Collar & Stuart 1985). This species' known distribution is mostly confined to the Lake Alaotra region, northeastern Madagascar (Langrand 1990), where in 1930 it was relatively common (Delacour 1932). Since that time the population of Madagascar Pochards has drastically declined. The most recent published record of it on Lake Alaotra is from 1960 (Payne, in Dee 1986); the only later observation was made in March 1970 on Lake Ambohibao near Antananarivo (Salvan 1970). Ornithological expeditions were undertaken to Lake Alaotra in 1971 (Forbes-Watson, in Dee 1986), December 1982. (Wilmé unpublished), September 1985 (Thompson *et al.* 1987), 1987 (Wilmé unpublished), October-November 1989 (Young & Smith 1989, 1990), and September-November 1989 and January-February 1990 (Wilmé in prep.), some designed specifically to search for the Madagascar Pochard, but it was not seen. The possible reasons for its decline on Lake Alaotra have been discussed by Young & Smith (1989) and Wilmé (in prep.).

Given that more than 20 years have passed since the last confirmed record of the Madagascar Pochard on Lake Alaotra, even after intensive ornithological surveys of the region, it was most astonishing that one was captured alive on the lake by some fowlers in August 1991. The bird, a male in adult plumage, was netted on 29 August 1991 along the western-central edge of Lake Alaotra, near the village of Anororo (17°30'S, 48°26'E), in a region known locally as "Mahakary". Measurements (in mm) of the live bird include: exposed culmen 46.5, tarsus 57.5; weight 685 g. In July 1992 the primaries, secondaries and tail were in complete moult.

The fowlers responsible for the bird's capture have many years' experience trapping ducks on Lake Alaotra, and regularly catch up to sixty birds per week with mist-nets placed in or near rice fields. After the Madagascar Pochard was caught, it was shown to other active fowlers and fishermen in the immediate vicinity of Anororo, and no one was familiar with the species. The local fowlers were acquainted with a public education programme about the Madagascar Pochard initiated in 1989 by me in the Lake Alaotra area (Wilmé in prep.), and thus they understood the importance of their find. The duck was transferred to Antananarivo on 30 September 1991, where it is currently held in an aviary.

The finding of a single Madagascar Pochard on Lake Alaotra indicates that a remnant population may still exist. Whether this species is an extremely rare permanent resident on the lake or breeds elsewhere and is a seasonal migrant to the area is unknown. An intensive survey is needed of the remaining lakes and natural wetlands of the island to determine the status of the Madagascar Pochard and

other threatened wetland fauna. The results of this survey can then be used to recommend which wetlands should be given some protection by the Malagasy authorities in the context of the Ramsar Convention (Koester 1989) (still to be ratified in Madagascar). Currently there is no freshwater wetland protected in Madagascar (Nicoll & Langrand 1989).

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THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE NAME OF THE BRITISH RACE OF THE CHAFFINCH

In *Falco* 5, 1909, p. 13, Pastor Otto Kleinschmidt described an intersexual variant of the Chaffinch from western Europe (Germany and the British Isles) under the trinomen *Fringilla caelebs gengleri*, form. nov., designating as its type an adult ♂ from Hampstead, London, dated 22 June 1869 (*ex* Bowdler Sharpe collection). In 1933 the Dutch workers P. A. Hens & J. G. van Marle showed that the Chaffinches of the British Isles warranted recognition subspecifically on the browner, less vinaceous, red colour of the ear-coverts and underside in breeding males, adopting for them Kleinschmidt's name of 1909. Later, Witherby, *Handbook of British Birds*, vol. 1, 1938, pp. 104-107, Vaurie, *Birds of the Palearctic Fauna*, Passeriformes, 1959, p. 595, and other senior authors adopted Hens and van Marle's proposal and